



600 E Boulevard Ave., Dept. 602
Bismarck, ND 58505-0020

**Written Statement of
Roger Johnson
North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner
before the
House Agriculture Committee
on
Transferring USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to the
proposed Department of Homeland Security**

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10:00am**

Introduction

Chairman Combest and members of the House Agriculture Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on proposed legislation which creates a new Department of Homeland Security and transfers USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to this new department. My name is Roger Johnson and I am the North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner. I appear here today on behalf of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) and my fellow Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors from across the nation.

Strengthening Homeland Security is Important

NASDA strongly supports the efforts of Congress and the Administration to decisively and expeditiously strengthen homeland security. As partners in the federal system, state departments of agriculture are keenly aware of the need for an effective strategy to safeguard the nation's agricultural production tools, especially food safety and animal and plant health.

We agree that greater coordination and integration among agencies is vital to biosecurity. At first glance, consolidating and incorporating essential animal and plant inspection activities at the borders into a new department would seem to be a logical step in this direction. However, we urge you to fully and carefully examine how this proposal will affect the missions, tasks, and responsibilities of APHIS functions in all areas.

How Does Moving to Homeland Security Affect APHIS?

As you know, APHIS is responsible for safeguarding our nation's agricultural industry through animal and plant health protection and is the lead federal agency for veterinary accreditation, animal welfare, and predator control. It is the agency responsible for the protection of plant and animal health through prevention, early detection, eradication and control of pests and diseases, whether introduced by accident, by nature, or by deliberate act. APHIS also plays a major role in agricultural trade by working to monitor and prevent threats from pests and diseases and by identifying means in which these pests and diseases can negatively impact the agricultural sector.

APHIS has always been in the business of safeguarding American agriculture. Recognition that risks were increasing, largely due to increased levels of trade and travel, led to APHIS-PPQ and APHIS-VS commissioning safeguarding reviews to identify critical issues and make recommendations for improvements. ***Safeguarding American Plant Resources: A Stakeholder Review of the APHIS-PPQ Safeguarding System*** was conducted by the National Plant Board and was published in July, 1999. ***The Animal Health Safeguarding Review Results and Recommendations*** was published in October, 2001. That review was conducted by the NASDA Research Foundation.

APHIS deals with many pests, such as medfly (citrus fruit fly) and Asian long-horned beetles (serious forest pest), and diseases, such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (brain wasting disease), citrus canker (disease of citrus), Karnal bunt (trade-distorting plant disease) and bovine tuberculosis (chronic debilitating zoonotic disease), that are not basic homeland security issues and will not likely receive the necessary emphasis in a homeland security agency. It is important to have the ability to distinguish bioterrorist attacks from natural outbreaks and inadvertent introductions.

We strongly believe that maintaining all federal duties and responsibilities dealing with animal and plant health issues under one federal agency is critical for the proper functioning and efficient protection of agriculture and the environment.

APHIS Infrastructure in Jeopardy

There is an extensive and complex state-federal cooperative infrastructure currently in place to address animal and plant health matters which would be placed in serious jeopardy by this legislation.

The backbone of our national animal and plant disease prevention, surveillance, and control programs is the cooperative effort between USDA and state animal and plant agencies. States rely heavily on the APHIS state-federal cooperative programs to provide critical resources and expertise in the areas of plant and animal health. Many state agriculture programs and services work closely with different divisions of APHIS,

including Veterinary Services, Wildlife Services, Plant Protection & Quarantine and Animal Care.

APHIS – Veterinary Services (VS)

In North Dakota, APHIS-Veterinary Services staffs ports of entry and conducts field work and surveillance. The North Dakota Board of Animal Health and the state veterinarians rely heavily on the field services provided by APHIS-VS, as there is no state-level field staff network in place.

APHIS-VS work is also critical at our ports of entry. The port of entry at Pembina, North Dakota, is the busiest port in the United States for the movement of animals. In 2001, more than 8 million animals, poultry, and eggs passed through the Pembina port.

In North Dakota, APHIS-VS:

- Cooperates with state and industry in disease eradication programs (e.g. TB, Brucellosis, Pseudorabies)
- Assists with surveillance for both eradicated and foreign animal diseases
- Provides expertise with regard to disease epidemiology
- Monitors trends in animal agriculture
- Conducts necessary activities to support trade of animals and animal products
- Interacts with state officials and industry regarding scientific practical approaches to emerging disease issues (e.g. Chronic Wasting Disease, Scrapie, BSE)

APHIS – Wildlife Services (WS)

APHIS–Wildlife Services serves a critical role in North Dakota by reducing animal damage and depredation on farms and in communities and also by reducing animal damage and risk at public facilities such as airports. The work of Wildlife Services is domestic in scope and largely locally focused. Wildlife Services has entered into a number of cooperative agreements on the state, county, and local levels in North Dakota which involves state, county and local governmental units financially supporting Wildlife Services.

Wildlife Services works to protect:

- cattle, sheep and poultry from depredation
- sunflowers and other grain crops from damage by blackbirds
- crops from damage by waterfowl
- human health and safety at airports
- trees and roadways from damage by beaver

In 2001 in North Dakota, Wildlife Services responded to 1164 predator conflicts, 147 incidents involving human health issues and fielded 540 beaver complaints.

National Wildlife Research centers conduct scientific research across the nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure Wildlife Services specialists use state of the art science and technology.

APHIS – Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ)

North Dakota relies heavily on services provided by APHIS-Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ).

Relating to exclusion activities at ports of entry, PPQ:

- Monitors seed shipments entering our state to assure compliance with the Federal Seed Act and to ensure that Federal noxious weeds are not introduced.
- Monitors plants and plant products that enter ND to ensure that they meet phytosanitary requirements.

Relating to pest management, PPQ:

- Conducts invasive species management. PPQ is a principal leader and cooperator in the management of invasive weeds through biological control program activities. Leafy spurge is a classic success story in progress, but there are numerous other weeds where progress is being made.
- Offers cooperative grasshopper programs. PPQ plays a critical role in developing and implementing cooperative control programs for grasshopper suppression and control on rangeland in ND and in the western United States.

Relating to pest detection, PPQ:

- Provides necessary national coordination and support for detection surveys for quarantine pests.

Relating to agricultural trade, PPQ:

- Provides the framework and oversight necessary for state agriculture departments to provide phytosanitary certification of agricultural products for export.
- Helps resolve phytosanitary trade issues that impede our ability to export agricultural plant products.
- Has assisted in addressing grain movement issues through Canada and is currently working on potato issues with Mexico.

APHIS – Animal Care (AC)

An APHIS-Animal Care employee is also stationed in North Dakota. This position is charged with inspecting kennels, zoos and other pet production facilities to ensure the proper treatment of animals. While Animal Care is an important and necessary public

service, proper care and housing of animals does not necessarily relate to homeland security.

Our staff relies heavily on the working relationships established with APHIS employees to carry out a number of cooperative programs and to respond to situations of animal disease and plant pests. If these types of domestic/state APHIS activities are diminished, most states would be unable to provide the resources and expertise to continue these vital programs.

The vast majority of APHIS programs and services are not directly related to homeland security, rather they are integral parts of safeguarding American agriculture. We are concerned that APHIS programs and services may be compromised or possibly eliminated if APHIS is split up or incorporated into another federal department.

Moving APHIS May Diminish Biosecurity Efforts

USDA commissioned and received an external review with detailed recommendations for the safeguarding and protection of animal health with implications for protection of homeland security. Another report commissioned in 1999 on Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) provides additional review and proposals. The placement of APHIS into the Department of Homeland Security will split key agriculture offices between two federal agencies.

The transfer of APHIS calls into question the ability of the Secretary of Agriculture to access the necessary professional resources and adequate emergency funds necessary to combat plant and animal pests and diseases whether introduced by nature, by accident or by deliberate act. The transfer of APHIS may actually delay the implementation of the recommendations contained in the reviews, thus, making US agriculture more vulnerable to a bioterrorist attack.

We strongly believe that realigning USDA-APHIS activities and resources as currently proposed would be counterproductive and could actually have the unintended consequence of diminishing our biosecurity efforts, rather than enhancing them.

APHIS Move May Hamper Internal Cooperation

As a USDA agency, APHIS also maintains many close working relationships with other USDA agencies, including:

- Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
- Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)
- Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS)

A prime example of this inter-agency cooperation in North Dakota is our “Team Leafy Spurge” project, which has been successful in large part due to the cooperative efforts of our agency, local weed boards, ARS and APHIS. If APHIS is splintered off into a separate agency, we are concerned that these cooperative efforts may no longer be possible.

Leave APHIS Intact: Coordinate Efforts with Homeland Security

We believe that cross-utilization and coordination of APHIS functions with the Department of Homeland Security will enhance the United States’ ability to safeguard agriculture and the environment more effectively than the transfer of these duties in APHIS to the new agency. State departments of agriculture strongly encourage you to consider this approach.

We need to ensure that we have top-notch surveillance, early detection, response, and long-term management capabilities in place in order to safeguard agriculture and the environment. These measures need to be in place for U.S., regardless of how an organism, disease, or other threat is introduced – naturally, purposely, or inadvertently. The proposed move of APHIS into Homeland Security seems to imply that the work of APHIS may be focused on purposeful introduction of a threat to agriculture, while excluding focus on potential natural and inadvertent threats.

We believe that the proposed office of homeland security, APHIS, and American agriculture as a whole would be better served if APHIS were able to coordinate its efforts in its current form with a new homeland security department.

Conclusion

In summary, NASDA believes that:

- maintaining all federal duties and responsibilities dealing with animal and plant health issues under one federal agency is critical for the proper functioning and efficient protection of agriculture and the environment.
- The vast majority of APHIS programs and services are not directly related to homeland security, rather they are integral parts of safeguarding American agriculture. We are concerned that APHIS programs and services may be compromised or possibly eliminated if APHIS is split up or incorporated into another federal department.
- realigning USDA-APHIS activities and resources as currently proposed would be counterproductive and could actually have the unintended consequence of diminishing our biosecurity efforts, rather than enhancing them.

- the proposed office of homeland security, APHIS, and American agriculture as a whole would be better served if APHIS were able to coordinate its efforts in its current form with a new homeland security department.

The state departments of agriculture are keenly aware of the need to strengthen protections against terrorist threats or attacks in the United States. We stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration to develop an effective strategy to safeguard our agricultural production tools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.